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Abstract

The dialogue between the model Athenian landowner Ischomachus and his wife recounted in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* appears to offer a rare glimpse of the inner workings of an -ordinary Athenian household and a rare portrait of an ordinary Athenian wife. Through Ischomachus's report to Socrates of a series of conversations in which he instructed his wife in her proper activities, the dialogue provides both an account of the occupations of an Athenian wife and observations on her role in the household by both herself and her husband.

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HOW A WOMAN CAN BE MORE LIKE A MAN: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISCHOMACHUS AND HIS WIFE IN XENOPHON'S *OECONOMICUS*

Sheila Murnaghan

The dialogue between the model Athenian landowner Ischomachus and his wife recounted in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* appears to offer a rare glimpse of the inner workings of an ordinary Athenian household and a rare portrait of an ordinary Athenian wife. Through Ischomachus's report to Socrates of a series of conversations in which he instructed his wife in her proper activities, the dialogue provides both an account of the occupations of an Athenian wife and observations on her role in the household by both herself and her husband.

This unusual degree of attention by a classical Greek author to a woman and to the domestic realm that she inhabits is further accompanied by exceptionally extensive and heightened praise of women and their role in the domestic economy. While the roles of husband and wife in the household are portrayed as markedly separate—with the husband occupying himself with outside tasks and the wife occupying herself with inside tasks in accord with a divinely ordained division of capacities (*Oec.* 7.22)—they are also portrayed as emphatically equal. The complementary functions of husband and wife are seen as making them mutually dependent, equally responsible for the prosperity of the household, and each capable of outshining the other in the performance of their respective tasks (*Oec.* 7.27).

The rareness of this portrait may make it unusually precious as a source; however, it also imposes the interpretive challenge of identifying the inspiration for an expression of interest in and esteem for the part played by women in Athenian society that normally did not find its way into our literary sources. Some scholars have referred that question to Xenophon's biography, speculating that this is a veiled portrait of his highly prized relations with his own wife Philesia.¹ But even if one assumes—as one surely should not—that Xenophon must have had personal experience of a successful marriage in order to depict that of Ischomachus, this still does not account for his choosing to celebrate marriage in a literary form as virtually no other author of his culture did.²

Whatever its now irrecoverable roots in his own experience, Xenophon's unusually attentive treatment of Ischomachus's wife must be understood in its larger context as part of a philosophical dialogue on the subject of *oikonomia*, or household management. In other words,

even though it may seem to present ordinary contemporary Athenians in contrast to the mythological heroes and heroines of a more overtly fictional genre like tragedy, it is nonetheless artificial, stylized, and idealized. The dialogue between Ischomachus and his wife is embedded in an elaborately contrived dramatic frame: the narrator is reporting a discussion of *oikonomia* between Socrates and a man called Critobulus; in the course of that discussion, Socrates seeks to illustrate the qualities of the ideal householder by quoting a previous discussion with a representative of those qualities, Ischomachus; included in the responses Socrates quotes is Ischomachus's account of his own previous discussions with his wife. Thus the words of husband and wife come to us mediated by a process of triple quotation, reported by Ischomachus himself to Socrates, by Socrates to Critobulus, and finally by the narrator, who claims to have heard Socrates' conversation with Critobulus, to his readers. The degree of stylization suggested by the highly quotable quality of these words is matched by the presence of a number of improbable elements in the situation that is evoked. Many commentators have expressed surprise that Ischomachus's wife should receive instruction in household matters from her husband rather than from her mother.³ Even more clearly unrealistic is the section of the dialogue in which Ischomachus conducts his wife on a tour of a house in which she has evidently been living for some time (*Oec.* 9.2-5).⁴

The idealization and artificiality of this portrait are conditioned by the treatise's central aim: to justify the life led by aristocratic landowners such as Ischomachus as not only the most desirable but also the most admirable way of life. Throughout the dialogue, practical information about farming and household management is subordinated to repeated claims that such activities are identified with the highest forms of virtue, and in particular with the exercise of *sôphrosunê*, "self-mastery" or "self-control."⁵ Making that claim depends, above all, on demonstrating that such a life does not promote the selfish private interests of individual property holders at the expense of the common good.⁶ Thus in the opening section of the treatise Socrates delivers an encomium on *geôrgia*, "farming," in which he praises it as the occupation that best prepares a man to help others, and particularly to help his city through military service (*Oec.* 5.1-17; 6.10; cf. *Mem.* 3.4.11-12). This claim that owners of estates are especially able to help their friends and to serve their cities becomes a recurrent refrain throughout the dialogue (cf. *Oec.* 11.11; 11.13).

The success of the dialogue thus depends above all on a denial of difference, specifically a form of difference that was a concern in classical Greek political thinking, the divergence between the public interests of a theoretically egalitarian and orderly city and the potentially disruptive, hence deeply suspect, private interests generated by the possession of private property. This concern was focused especially on the household, which, as the location of personal wealth, was the scene of provocative

distinctions between individuals that could threaten the harmony and stability of the city;⁷ this threat was felt very powerfully in Greek cities, like both Athens⁸ and Sparta, which in their ideologies stressed the equality and interchangeability of their citizens.⁹ In Athens, this concern was evidently reflected in Solon's reforms, which included restrictions on the display of private wealth (as well as the display of personal emotions, expressed particularly in the mourning of women) on the public occasions of funerals.

One of Xenophon's most striking strategies for eliminating the distinction between public and private interests is his attempt to show that *oikonomia* is not linked to the possession of private property. This claim is already implicit in the idea of making *oikonomia* the subject of a Socratic dialogue, in the very suggestion that this is a subject that could interest Socrates, a figure known for his poverty and his indifference to material possessions.¹⁰ That gesture is reinforced throughout the dialogue by the presentation of farming as a truly egalitarian occupation because it is so easy that its procedures are self-evident and require no specialized skill.¹¹ This is dramatized in the final section when Ischomachus uses Socrates' own techniques to demonstrate that Socrates has in fact known how to farm all along.

The absence of any connection between *oikonomia* and wealth is also stressed at the very beginning of the dialogue, where the first point established by Socrates and Critobulus is that the same knowledge that allows someone to manage his own estate could allow a man without an estate to manage someone else's (*Oec.* 1.1-4). This is immediately followed by a process of redefinition in which the *oikos*, "estate," is identified with both *ta ktēmata*, "property," and *ta chrēmata*, "wealth," and then property and wealth are redefined to denote, not tangible possessions, but anything that is well managed and beneficial, including friends and musical instruments and excluding even money if it is in the hands of someone lacking the virtues necessary to manage it well. The most important requisite for *oikonomia* becomes not the possession of an *oikos* but the possession of the virtuous character needed to resist enslavement to the passions (*Oec.* 1.16-23).

The *Oeconomicus* thus opens with a definition of *oikonomia* that opposes it to all that the *oikos* was typically thought of as representing: passion, unruliness, and selfish private interests. Having detached *oikonomia* from wealth in order to align it with virtue, Xenophon then reconnects it to the ownership of land through the evocation in the figure of Ischomachus of someone who combines public-spirited virtue with the possession of a well-run estate.¹² The detailed account of Ischomachus's estate and its workings that occupies the rest of the dialogue serves as an extended demonstration of the compatibility of virtue and *oikonomia*. Xenophon's exceptionally thorough treatment of Ischomachus's wife must be understood as the first and most compelling step in that demonstration.

The subject of Ischomachus's wife is given prominence by the fact that it comes up as soon as Ischomachus and Socrates begin to talk. Socrates' first question to Ischomachus is about how he spends his time and is accompanied by a comment that he clearly seems not to spend his time indoors (*Oec.* 7.2). Ischomachus explains that he doesn't need to spend time indoors because he has a wife capable of looking after his house. This leads to an elaborate account of how he came to have such a wife, in which the stress is on Ischomachus's own role in training her. This training takes the form of three separate conversations, each introduced by a lapse on the part of the wife: her initial ignorance on arriving in the household (*Oec.* 7.5ff.), her failure to find an object for which her husband had asked her (8.1ff.), and her use of cosmetics (9.2ff.). As will be seen, these lapses do not betoken simply a lack of practical skill but also a susceptibility to moral slackness.

Ischomachus's account of his wife's education dramatizes the elimination of the potential for disorder from the household through the training of that inhabitant who both is most closely identified with the house, as her activities are restricted to it, and is understood to be most naturally prone to disorder. Classical Greek culture was pervaded by a view of women as having a less fully developed capacity for *sôphrosunê* than men, and therefore as representing humanity in its vulnerability to passion, irrationality, physicality, and possession by external forces.¹³ At the same time, women, like children, were seen as educable, as capable of overcoming their propensity to unruliness and of acquiring, as Ischomachus's wife does, the degree of virtue characteristic of men.¹⁴ Ischomachus's essentially moral instruction of his wife develops the quality of *sôphrosunê* that was already her one significant endowment when she came to him as a bride¹⁵ and brings about the result that Xenophon aims at elsewhere in the construction of his argument: an elimination of difference. For the effect of that instruction is that Ischomachus's wife becomes morally indistinguishable from a man, so that the assimilation of private to public interests necessary to Xenophon's glorification of *oikonomia* is reinforced by an assimilation within Ischomachus's marriage of the female partner to the male.¹⁶ This is indicated very pointedly in Socrates' approving comment that, in reporting his wife's eager acquiescence to his advice, Ischomachus reveals her "*andrikên . . . dianoiân*," "manly understanding" (*Oec.* 10.1).¹⁷

As she attains the virtues appropriate to her role in the household, Ischomachus's wife becomes closely identified with her husband, both in the sense that her material interests merge with his (*Oec.* 7.13) and in the sense that she takes on qualities that are understood to be characteristically male. The fact that Ischomachus's lesson is above all designed to make her more like a man helps to explain Xenophon's depiction of this inherently improbable situation in which Ischomachus's wife receives instruction from her husband that realistically she should have received from her mother. Indeed, in drawing attention to this peculiarity, S. C.

Humphreys suggestively compares this scene of instruction to the kind of education that was a central feature of idealized Greek homosexual relationships, especially in philosophical circles.¹⁸ The dialogue between Ischomachus and his wife is thus assimilated to the two other dialogues that form its nested fictional frames: Ischomachus's dialogue with Socrates, and Socrates' dialogue with Critobulus, both conversations between two men, taking place in outdoor, public settings, and focusing on the moral, rather than the practical, requirements of a good life.¹⁹ Indeed Ischomachus sets out to converse (his term is *dialogesthai*; cf. *Oec.* 1.1) with his wife in the manner of Socrates: he begins by pretending to question her on a topic on which he in fact knows more than she does (*Oec.* 7.10).²⁰

Ischomachus's success in educating his wife to resemble him more closely does not reduce, but rather reinforces, the division between their lives. There is, to be sure, a stress on the equality and symmetry of their roles, for example in the formulation of his task as controlling what goes into the house and hers as controlling what goes out (*Oec.* 3.14-15). But the result of their closer identification is not a sharing of functions, but a transfer of the benefits of his wife's state of inner order to Ischomachus. Once she has been safely trained, he can afford to give his full attention to affairs outside the household. As was noted above, this is stressed in the dramatic situation of his conversation with Socrates: because he has such a well-trained wife, Ischomachus can spend all of his time outside the house and thus is able to wait around in the agora to keep an appointment with some tardy foreigners—and to enter into dialogue with Socrates in the meantime (*Oec.* 7.3). And however much effort may go into portraying the realms inside and outside the house as symmetrical, there is finally no question that outside is the only really desirable place to be: indeed Socrates' first approach to Ischomachus is accompanied by the ingratiating comment that he looks like someone who spends all of his time outside (*Oec.* 7.2).²¹ The more perfect Ischomachus's wife becomes, the less she and the realm of the household that she inhabits occupy the attention of her husband. As she becomes an object of admiration, she also becomes a blank surrogate for her husband who can safely be trusted and ignored. Thus she is like the wife of Critobulus, to whom Critobulus entrusts matters of the highest importance while hardly speaking to her at all (*Oec.* 3.12).²²

This presentation of his wife's virtue as essentially an attribute of Ischomachus²³—as both achieved by him and significant because of its advantages for him—makes it clear that this dialogue is really not concerned with her as a distinct individual. Indeed Ischomachus's account of his relations of his wife, with its stress on their identification, can be read as an unstated allegory of the ordering of a single personality, of which Ischomachus and his wife represent two sides.²⁴ Ischomachus's training of his wife symbolizes his mastery of the feminine potential for disorder and self-indulgence in his own

personality and allows the effective presentation to the world of a wholly male persona, as is expressed in his availability to be interrogated by Socrates in the agora as a leading example of a man who is *kalos k'agathos*. What is implied in the dramatic setting of the dialogue is also expressed in its structure. The section on the wife's training is presented as preliminary to an examination of Ischomachus's own activities, to which Socrates explicitly changes the subject at the end of it (*Oec.* 11.1).

In his conversation with Socrates, Ischomachus is revealing, not simply, or even primarily, his skill at household management, but his moral character. And in describing his wife, he is describing a side of himself as much as another person. It is notable that this self-presentation takes the form of a reported dialogue in which he speaks both parts and stresses her inherent *sôphrosunê*, his own prominent role in training her, and her eager compliance, and in which he is willing to suggest that she might even become his superior (*Oec.* 7.42).²⁵ The stellar achievements of Ischomachus's wife, over which Socrates and Ischomachus both do so much gloating, do not represent an unusually high opinion of women on Xenophon's part,²⁶ but rather an unusually optimistic vision of human nature in general—a conviction that it can conquer and eliminate the capacity for irrationality that women symbolize.

What Ischomachus's wife in part represents—a psychological field where irrationality is either conquered or yielded to—is also represented spatially by the house, the physical realm that she inhabits. Thus the elimination of any dangerous potential for disorder and sloth from her character—which means effectively her disappearance as a distinct individual—is accompanied by the elimination of the household as a distinct realm of potential danger and therefore of concern for Ischomachus.

The dialogue is pervaded by an implicit analogy between the condition of the wife's character and the condition of the household. Her moral progress towards reliability and rationality is expressed in a new, more orderly arrangement of all the possessions within the household. This analogy stems from an underlying association between the female character as the locus of disorderly human passions and the house as the physical arena in which such passions are harbored and expressed, which Xenophon shared with many other Greek men. That same association is, for example, reflected in Lysias 1: as Euphiletus describes his wife's good behavior in the period before what he represents as her complete moral collapse under the influence of Eratosthenes, he mentions specifically that she kept his possessions in an orderly fashion (*Lys.* 1.7). In that context, it is clear that household order is an external symbol of female virtue, and in particular of female chastity.

In the *Oeconomicus*, the relationship between keeping objects in their proper place and female chastity becomes explicit in Ischomachus's description of the women's quarters in his house: "Then I pointed out to

her the women's apartments, separated from the men's by a bolted door, so that nothing may be taken out that shouldn't be and so that the servants may not produce offspring without our knowledge" (*Oec.* 9.5). In Ischomachus's symmetrical formulation, the impregnation of female servants stands where one might expect a reference to the bringing in of foreign objects.²⁷

The moral and psychological dimension of the order established in Ischomachus's house is reflected also in the wife's blush of shame at not being able to find something her husband asks her for (*Oec.* 8.1), which is followed by a complete rationalization of the placement of household objects. This setting of the house in order takes the dramatic form of a tour through its rooms led by Ischomachus, who thereby demonstrates his superior mastery over this realm. The tour is designed to reveal the house's "*dunamis*," "potential" (*Oec.* 9.2), as if it were, like the female character, endowed with an unrealized capacity for order. The result of this training is that the wife attains a state in which her behavior supports her husband's claim that a wife who is *sôphrôn* prefers to look after her possessions than to neglect them (*Oec.* 9.19).²⁸ This psychologizing of physical order also emerges in a kind of animation of the relationship between objects and their proper places: certain places summon certain objects (*Oec.* 9.3); if something is not where it is supposed to be, its assigned place misses it (*Oec.* 8.10).²⁹

As Ischomachus's wife undergoes a training that makes her comparable to her husband, the corresponding transformation of the space she properly inhabits—the *oikos*—makes it comparable to the space he properly inhabits—the *polis*. The elimination of difference between wife and husband leads also to the elimination of difference between household and city. Thus it emerges that a well-run household is not a place where subversive and antisocial private interests are secretly pursued, but simply a microcosm of a well-run city. Through a series of comparisons, Xenophon asserts a similarity between a household in which there is no disorder and the *kurios* is consequently free to engage in business with outsiders, and a city in which there is no internal conflict or rivalry and which is therefore able to fight successfully against external enemies. This analogy is underscored by the detail that the appointment Ischomachus is waiting to keep is with foreigners (*Oec.* 7.2).

As Ischomachus's household achieves its ideal form, it loses the sense of distinction and hierarchy among its inhabitants that was seen as one of the chief features differentiating the *oikos* from the *polis*. Once Ischomachus's wife becomes both similar and equal to him in the ways discussed above, the process is repeated with members of the household who are inferior with respect to status as well as gender. Husband and wife choose a housekeeper who is already possessed of *sôphrosunê* and school her to share their noble conception of justice and to see her interests and theirs as identical, at which point they put her in her

proper place: "We then installed her in the place" (*Oec.* 9.13). Later in the dialogue Ischomachus describes the similar process by which he selected and trained a bailiff (*Oec.* 12.1ff.)—a description which is introduced as a further explanation of why Ischomachus is free to stay away from home and converse with Socrates.³⁰

Ischomachus repeatedly describes the imposition of order on his household through comparisons to civic institutions, and specifically to institutions that expressed the impersonal, egalitarian, and collective character of Athenian civic life. Responding to his wife's failure to find a certain object with an encomium on *taxis*, "order," he cites as examples of situations in which order is similarly essential three of the most important groupings of male citizens: a chorus, an army, and the crew of a trireme (*Oec.* 8.3-9). Shortly afterwards, he appeals to the market as an example of a well-ordered space (*Oec.* 8.22). The specific model for the organization they put into effect is an actual merchant ship, which is admirably described at considerable length (*Oec.* 11.17). Furthermore, the sorting of the various objects in the house is termed a division "*kata phulas*," "according to tribes," echoing the division into tribes that governed the participation of Athenian citizens in such public bodies as the army and the *boulê* (*Oec.* 9.6). Within the ordered household, the wife's role is comparable to that of a public official—a *nomophulax* or a *phrouarchos* or a member of the *boulê* (*Oec.* 9.14-15).³¹

One result of Xenophon's attempt to present the ideal household as similar to the ideal city is the obsession that runs through this section with the elimination of anything hidden, secret, or duplicitous. One example of this obsession is the episode in which Ischomachus discovers his wife wearing makeup and teaches her to agree that it is better to be straightforward than to render in this way a misleading impression.³² Another is Ischomachus's rhapsodic praise of order among household possessions:

Indeed all other things look somehow finer when they are kept in order. Each kind of thing looks like a chorus of implements, and even the space between them looks fine, as everything has been kept out of it—just as a circular chorus is not only itself a fine sight, but even the space within it looks pure and fine (*Oec.* 8.20).

Ischomachus evokes a vision of order that incorporates into its scheme the spaces between the ordered objects, thus assuring that those empty spaces cannot be invaded by chaos: the household (and by extension the individual personality and the city) is purged of any opportunity for internal disorder.³³

In general, Ischomachus presents the life he pursues as characterized by extreme openness. In a later section of the dialogue he praises farming as the one occupation that depends least on exclusive knowledge as part of his attempt to support a vision of farming as democratic and public spirited (*Oec.* 15.10ff.). Not only does this assertion allow him to claim that farming is an occupation that is open to anyone (a claim that disintegrates, however, at the very end of the dialogue, which concludes

with a celebration of the rare, divinely bestowed gift of leadership), but it reinforces the connection between farming and *ta phanera*, visible, real property, as opposed to more suspect, hidden wealth, that was an important element in defenses of the life of the aristocratic landowner.³⁴

This desire to stress the openness and visibility of the household's contents and activities accounts for the repeated comparisons throughout the *Oeconomicus* between household affairs and public performances and spectacles. Ischomachus's claim that farming is an unusually open profession takes the form of a claim that a good farmer willingly gives a public performance:

For the other artisans in some way conceal the most important features of their arts; among farmers, on the other hand, the one who plants in the finest manner would be very pleased if someone watched him do it, and similarly with the one who sows in the finest manner. (*Oec.* 15.11).

A range of similar comparisons makes the same point about what happens inside the house.

In addition to identifying a well-run house with a chorus in the passage quoted above,³⁵ Ischomachus describes the pleasing sight of his wife outshining her maid in healthy good looks in terms of a public beauty contest: "And a wife's appearance, when she outrivals her maid in being purer and more suitably dressed, becomes an arousing sight" (*Oec.* 10.12, my translation). (This depiction of mistress and maid as participants in the same competition represents another instance of a hierarchical relationship being recast as one of equality.) Later, Ischomachus compares the whole conduct of his life, including his relations with his wife, to a public trial (*Oec.* 11.22-25).³⁶ Furthermore, the philosophical inquiry into household management that forms the occasion of the dialogue is itself compared to a performance or spectacle. In his conversation with Critobulus, Socrates compares the experience of observing a bad farmer to that of going to a comedy (*Oec.* 3.7). He tells Ischomachus that he would rather hear him give an account of his training of his wife than one of an athletic contest or horse race (*Oec.* 7.9) and that he would rather contemplate her virtues than a painting by Zeuxis (*Oec.* 10.1).

A number of scholars have argued that the place and time in which the *Oeconomicus* is set, Athens of the late fifth century, was the setting of a new awareness of the distinction between public and private life and of the divergent interests of the two spheres.³⁷ Xenophon's dialogue, with its determination to deny that any such separation exists,³⁸ is no doubt in part a specific response to developments in the environment in which he grew up, a response that reflects his own interests as a member of the landowning class. But the *Oeconomicus* must also be understood more broadly as one expression of a common utopian impulse. For the elimination of the distinction between private and public life, and with it of the subversive effects of individual desire on the common good, is a recurrent feature of utopian writing. In More's *Utopia*, it involves an

attenuation of family life through communal meals, the abolition of private property, and constant free access to private houses for all members of the community.³⁹ In Plato's *Republic*, modeled on Sparta, the city Xenophon admired most,⁴⁰ it involves a more radical elimination of private life as expressed in personal family ties and private property.

In the similarly wish-fulfilling realm of comedy, a comparable assimilation takes place. In the case of Aristophanes, this serves to eliminate difficulties associated with the public rather than the private sphere. In such plays as *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*, the public sphere becomes a large-scale version of the household in which political problems are solved as easily as—it is implied—domestic problems are solved there (cf. especially *Lysistrata* 567-86). The plots of new comedy are also often aimed at the elimination of troublesome divergences between public and private interests: a conflict generated by a young man's personal preference for a woman of low social status is resolved by the discovery that she is actually a citizen.⁴¹

This similarity between the *Oeconomicus* and works that identify themselves more explicitly as fantasies should help to remind us of the degree of idealization with which it presents what is ostensibly a portrait of near contemporary social realities. This realization should in turn increase the caution with which we embrace this text as a source, so that we read it not as direct testimony to the lives and sentiments of actual men and women but as a projection of a wished-for state, in which a female figure receives unusual attention and honor for her capacity not to represent but to transcend those qualities conventionally identified as female.

NOTES

1. E.g., Pierre Chantraine, *Xénophon, Économique* (Editions Budé, 1949), p. 9; Jean Luccioni, *Les idées politiques et sociales de Xénophon* (Paris: Orphys, 1947), p. 83; E. C. Marchant, *Xenophon, Memorabilia and Oeconomicus* (Loeb Classical Library; London and Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. xxvi.

2. This is not, of course, to claim that there were in classical Athens no mutually respectful marriages and no men capable of appreciating women's contributions to the welfare of the household. Indeed the *Oeconomicus* could not have been written in the form that it was if it could not make some claim to plausibility. But it is significant that the presence of such attitudes did not translate itself into an interest in portraying successful marriages in literary form. There are certainly admirable wives in tragedy, but, in that context, their virtue exacts costly sacrifices (e.g. Alcestis in Euripides' *Alcestis*) and does not prevent them from destroying their husbands and themselves (e.g. Deianira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*). For the expression of sentiments such as those found in the *Oeconomicus* in the subsequent philosophical tradition, see the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomica*, of which the first book certainly, and the third book probably, derives from Xenophon's work. For examples of Greek funerary inscriptions in which a husband expresses affection and appreciation for his wife, see Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 275-76.

3. For an attempt to explain this improbable state of affairs, see Stewart Irvin Oost, "Xenophon's Attitude Toward Women," *CW*, 7 (1977/78), 226, n. 5.

4. Another sign that the main concerns of the dialogue do not coincide exactly with those actually involved in forming and maintaining a household is the downplaying of what was in fact a central purpose of classical Greek marriage, the production of children (*Oec.* 7.12). Xenophon's relative silence on the raising of children has caught the notice of commentators, who have tried to use it to date the dialogue either to a time before he had children or to a later period when the death of his son would have made the subject too painful. See Édouard Delebecque, "Sur la date et l'objet de l'*Économique*," *REG*, 44 (1951), 24, 55. See Luccioni (above, note 1), p. 79, n. 44, for the comment that Xenophon should have written a treatise on the education of children. One response to the unreality of the dialogue is to interpret it as Luccioni does, as a program for social reform (pp. 74-77).

5. On Xenophon's exceptional preoccupation with *sôphrosunê* throughout his writings, see Helen North, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 123ff. On the ethical dimension of the treatise in general, see Sandra Taragna Novo, *Economia ed Etica nell'Economico di Senofonte* (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1968).

6. On the assertion of a similarity between public and private affairs elsewhere in Xenophon's works and in the writings of fourth-century writers of oligarchical leanings generally, see Luccioni (above, note 1), pp. 101-03; on this as a special interest of Xenophon's, see also W. E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), pp. 30ff.

7. For a thoughtful exposition of this point, see S. C. Humphreys, "Public and Private Interests in Classical Athens," *The Family, Women, and Death* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 22-32.

8. On the thoroughly Athenian coloring of the *Oeconomicus*, see Delebecque (above, note 4), 27-31. It is not necessary to conclude as Delebecque does that this reflects a feeling of coolness towards Sparta, or that it tells us anything about the date of the dialogue.

9. On the supposed identity of all citizens as a fundamental aspect of the spiritual universe of the polis, see J.-P. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 60-68.

10. The idea of combining the subject of household management and the figure of Socrates was probably original with Xenophon. See Hans Rudolf Breitenbach, "Xenophon von Athen," *RE*, 9A.2, 1871.

11. For a critique of Xenophon's claim that farming is both easy and good training for military service, see Delebecque (above, note 4), 49-50.

12. A lingering sense of the tension between public and private interests can perhaps be detected in Ischomachus's rather heavy-handed joke about how, when people are trying to induce him to perform the public service of a liturgy, that is, to invest his private resources in public projects, they do not refer to him by the anonymous, honorific (thus more public) label of *kalos k'agathos*, but by his own distinctive (thus private) name (*Oec.* 7.3).

13. For an important expression of this view, see Aristotle, *Pol.* 1260a7. For discussion and further references, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 98-102; Roger Just, "Conceptions of Women in Classical Athens," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 6 (1975), 153-70; Ruth Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt, ed., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), pp. 3-19. Helen North (above, note 5), p. 131, n. 24, observes that "sophrosyne throughout Greek literature is always the virtue proper to the young, and of course to women—i.e. to all those members of society of whom obedience is required." The comparison of women to the young is suggestive; like the young, women were expected to be obedient because they were in need of guidance (cf. Ischomachus's wife who views her husband's instruction as help out of a great difficulty [*Oec.* 9.2]) and, also like the young, were seen as capable of transcending their inadequacies with the help of training. North details further the special association between women and *sôphrosunê* in "The Mare, the Vixen, and the Bee: *Sophrosyne* as the Virtue of Women in Antiquity," *ICS*, 2 (1977), 35-48.

14. In this way, the categories of masculinity and femininity could be used to refer, not to actual sexual difference, but to degrees of self-mastery in people of either sex. The converse to Ischomachus's wife's transformation into someone who is morally a man is represented in

Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: when Heracles confronts his own vulnerability to disease and helplessness in the face of pain, he feels himself to be becoming a woman (lines 1071-75). On this point, see Nicole Loraux, "Le lit, la guerre," *L'Homme*, 21 (1981), 36-67; Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama," *Representations*, 11 (1985), 69-71.

15. Significantly, she has been trained already in one aspect of self-control, the control of her appetite, specifically of *ta amphi gastera*, "matters of the stomach" (*Oec.* 7.6). This detail identifies her as a virtuous wife who will not simply consume the fruits of her husband's labor, unlike the dronelike women described by Hesiod, who make what men produce disappear into their bellies (*Theog.* 598-99). See Breitenbach (above, note 10), 1853, on Hesiod as the ultimate source of many of Xenophon's views, a connection that is registered in Xenophon's use of the poetic word *euthemosunē* (cf. *W&D* 471) for order.

16. For a similar observation about the role of husband as envisioned by Hesiod in the *Works and Days*, see Pietro Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 112. On the widespread equation of the polarity between male and female with the polarity between public and private, see Michelle Rosaldo, "Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, edd., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 17-42.

17. Quotations in English from the *Oeconomicus* are taken from the translation by Carnes Lord in Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). The relative moral conditions of husband and wife are well illustrated in the episode in which he teaches her not to use cosmetics (*Oec.* 10.2-9). He instructs her by an analogy to himself, asking her how she would feel if he were to wear makeup. This establishes that they are in a sense morally comparable, but in reference to a temptation he might give into but doesn't, while she does. For the view that the deficiencies that distinguish women from men can be eliminated through training, see also *Symp.* 2.9.

18. Humphreys (above, note 7), p. 44. Interestingly, scholars who agree in seeing the dialogue as essentially realistic nonetheless vary widely in assessing its tone. Thus Marchant (above, note 1) refers to Ischomachus's wife as "that long-suffering little saint," (p. xxvi), whereas Chantraine (above, note 1), presumably responding as Xenophon intended, finds Ischomachus's speeches "charmantes par leur autorité débonnaire et leur gentillesse" (p. 8).

19. Socrates compares the experience of hearing Ischomachus describe his conversation with his wife to hearing an account of either of two all-male events: a gymnastic contest or a horse-race (*Oec.* 7.9).

20. For further parallels between Ischomachus's activities and Socrates', see Strauss (above, note 17), pp. 131-32, 148-49.

21. Cf. *Oec.* 4.2, where the so-called banausic arts, those practiced by craftsmen, are labeled inferior pursuits because they force their practitioners to stay inside and do not leave them the necessary leisure to help their friends and their cities.

22. Cf. Pericles' famous remark in the funeral oration—a speech of which both the function and the theme affirm the importance of spoken praise for male achievements—that the most desirable state for a woman is one in which she is not spoken about (Thuc. 2.46).

23. On a wife's character as an attribute of her husband, cf. *Oec.* 3.11, where the blame for a wife who misbehaves is assigned to the husband who failed to train her properly.

24. A prominent parallel for such allegorical thinking in Socratic literature is, of course, the overt analogy between a just soul and a just city in Plato's *Republic* (2.368c-69a). As will be seen, Xenophon's household is itself assimilated to a city in the course of the dialogue.

25. In another passage earlier in the dialogue, a man's character is similarly seen as determined by the nature of the woman with whom he associates: Socrates excludes from the category of the truly wealthy the man who uses his money to buy a hetaira and "through her [becomes] worse in body, worse in soul, and worse in regard to his household" (*Oec.* 1.13).

26. This is the view of Oost (above, note 3) who, revealingly, also points out (pp. 235-36) that, interpreted in this way, the *Oeconomicus* is unparalleled, both in Xenophon's other writings and in the culture in general.

27. On the pervasive association of the female body and the house as containing inner spaces capable of being invaded by darkness and chaos, see Padel (above, note 13), pp. 8-12;

J.-P. Vernant, "Hestia-Hermes: On the Religious Expression of Space and Movement Among the Greeks," in *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

28. Cf. 7.15 where possessing *sôphrasunē* is defined explicitly as keeping one's possessions in the best possible condition (*Oec.* 7.15). Plato also asserts a link between household order and virtue at *Gorgias* 504a.

29. This identification of the physical order of the household with the moral condition of its inhabitants is expressed in the use of the same vocabulary to refer to material and moral well-being: compounds of *auxō*, "increase," are applied both to increasing the material prosperity of the household (*Oec.* 7.16) and to increasing the sum of *ta kala k'agatha*, "virtue and nobility," in the world (*Oec.* 7.43). The verb *tassō*, "put in order," applies to the physical arrangement of the house (*Oec.* 8.2); its opposite, *ataktēō*, applies to a failure to observe the divinely ordained division of labor between husband and wife, a lapse that can lead to divine punishment (*Oec.* 7.31.) At 8.16 such punishment is said by the steward on the Phoenician ship to fall on those who do not keep their equipment well ordered. At 8.19 Ischomachus distinguishes between the *kompsoi*, the over-refined and witty man, who would laugh at the notion that properly arranged household objects possess beauty, and the *semmoi*, the serious man, who would not.

30. The bailiff is trained personally by Ischomachus so that the bailiff will be, like his wife, indistinguishable from himself: "I try to educate them myself. For if someone is to be sufficiently diligent when I am away, what must he know other than what I myself?" (*Oec.* 12.4). Ischomachus's rhetorical question here hints at the notion that it might be dangerous for the bailiff to have any knowledge other than that which he himself has.

31. Cf. also *Oec.* 11.24-25, where both the wife and the servants act out with Ischomachus the roles of participants in a legal trial.

32. Significantly, Ischomachus points out the dangerous duplicity of makeup through an analogy to a failure to disclose the nature and extent of one's material wealth (*Oec.* 10.3). Note also that the danger averted by locking off the women's quarters is that the servants will bear children secretly, without the householders knowing about it (*Oec.* 9.5). Giving a false outward impression through artifice is a traditional female failing, which corresponds to women's supposed inherent duplicity. This notion is, of course, central to the conception of Pandora in Hesiod's poems. Cf. also Euphilius's wife who is said to have started wearing makeup once she began deceiving her husband (Lys. 1.14), and the makeup-wearing figure of Vice in Xenophon's account of Prodicus's tale of the choice of Heracles (*Mem.* 2.1.22).

33. Cf. *Oec.* 8.7 where a well-ordered army on the march is praised not only for its anonymity and unanimity, but for the absence of any gaps between ranks: "For when they march in order, though there be tens of thousands of them, all march calmly, as one man; the empty spaces are always filled by those coming up from behind." The same principle applies to Ischomachus's time, which is normally occupied and contains no dangerously empty moments of leisure; the leisure he has to talk to Socrates on this occasion, like the spaces between chorus members, is structured by the appointment he is waiting to keep (*Oec.* 7.1-2).

34. On the distinction between visible and invisible property, see A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 230-32, and the ancient sources and modern discussions referred to there, and Humphreys (above, note 7), p. 10. At *Oec.* 20.13 this openness is attributed to land itself, which "doesn't show itself deceptively, but reveals simply and truthfully what it can do and what it cannot." On the close connection between the egalitarian ideology of the Greek city and acting "es meson," in a central public space, see Marcel Detienne, "En Grèce Archaique: Géométrie, Politique, et Société," *Annales ESC*, 20 (1965), 425-41.

35. Cf. 8.6 where what Ischomachus stresses about the orderly army to which an orderly house should be compared is what a beautiful sight it is for its friends, and what an unwelcome one for its enemies.

36. Cf. also 8.14, where the order on the Phoenician ship is compared to another form of visible public communication, writing: "I found that the boatswain . . . knew so well the place of every kind of thing that he could say, without being there, just where everything was kept and how many there were of each kind, and no less exactly than the knower of letters could say how many letters are in 'Socrates' and what their order is."

37. See Humphreys (above, note 7), pp. 22-32, and W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 175-94.

38. Humphreys (above, note 7), p. 24, identifies Pericles' relationship with Aspasia as an important reflection of this new sense of distinction. If so, it is notable that one of the ways in which Xenophon eliminates that distinction is by portraying Aspasia as an exponent of the vision of ideal female experience set forth in the dialogue (*Oec.* 3.14), assimilating her to his outlook in a move similar to that of portraying Socrates as deeply interested in the subject of estate management.

39. For an illuminating discussion of this point, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 41-47.

40. Xenophon's account of Sparta in *The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* has its own utopian cast, signaled by his nostalgic claim to be describing the way of life of an earlier time, from which the Spartans have now fallen away (*Lac.* 1.14), and by his observation that Spartan customs are exactly opposite to those of the rest of the Greeks (*Lac.* 1.10; cf. 10.6). Xenophon's version of Spartan society achieves a union of public and private by different means than does the world of the *Oeconomicus*. Rather than regulating the realm that women inhabit, that society brings women out of the household to participate more fully in an enlarged public realm; and the problem of impulses to criminal and secretive behavior is addressed, not by training such impulses out of existence, but by turning publicly approved activities into their objects: institutionalized theft as part of a boy's education (*Lac.* 2.6-9), and sexual activity among married couples (*Lac.* 1.5).

In actual Sparta, as James Redfield points out, "Wealth and poverty, private property, and economic competition were not eliminated but repressed from sight." "The Women of Sparta," *CJ*, 73 (1977/78), 157. The inevitable failure of this repression is reflected in Aristotle's view that Spartan women, whose ability to own property meant that they played an important role in the amassing of large fortunes, were exceptionally licentious (*Pol.* 1269b5-1270a13).

41. See Humphreys (above, note 7), pp. 62-63.